ÜBERMENSCH: Contending Nietzsche

by S. C. Sayles

Abstract

This paper examines S. C. Sayles's *ÜBERMENSCH: Contending Nietzsche*, a recent contribution to the study of Nietzsche's philosophy and its theological reception. The work situates Nietzsche's central doctrines—the death of God, the will to power, slave and master morality, the Übermensch, and eternal recurrence—within both the trajectory of his biography and the structure of his intellectual project. Sayles engages Nietzsche in a style deliberately shaped by Nietzsche's own aphoristic method, while bringing to bear biblical, theological, and metaphysical considerations. The analysis presented here considers the book's distinctive features, its interpretive strategies, and its significance for contemporary discussions of nihilism and modern unbelief.

Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) continues to exercise a profound influence on philosophy, literature, and culture. His proclamation of the "death of God," first announced in *The Gay Science*, has been read as a decisive turning point in the intellectual history of the West. The image of the "madman" who declares that the earth has been "unchained from its sun" encapsulates both the crisis of modernity and its possibilities for radical revaluation. For Nietzsche, this proclamation is not simply a rejection of metaphysics but the unveiling of nihilism as the horizon of Western thought.

S. C. Sayles's *ÜBERMENSCH: Contending Nietzsche* positions itself within this terrain of confrontation. The book does not approach Nietzsche as a distant historical figure, nor as a systematizer whose ideas can be neatly catalogued. Rather, Nietzsche is presented as a thinker whose style, rhetoric, and existential urgency demand to be met on their own terms. The work mirrors Nietzsche's aphoristic and polemical tone, yet turns his categories against themselves, subjecting them to scrutiny through the lens of theology and metaphysics.

The volume is also part of a broader project, *Veritas Contra Mundum*, in which the major philosophers of unbelief are engaged directly, without concessions to neutrality. In this framework, Nietzsche is confronted not as a curiosity of intellectual history, but as an enduring voice whose influence continues to shape modern thought. The review that follows will examine the principal contours of Sayles's argument, considering the

biographical framing of Nietzsche's thought, the methodological decision to mirror Nietzsche's rhetoric, the metaphysical framework that structures the critique, and the treatment of Nietzsche's central doctrines. The assessment will also consider the book's reflections on Nietzsche's legacy in philosophy, culture, and politics.

I. Nietzsche's Life as Prologue to His Philosophy

A distinctive feature of *ÜBERMENSCH* is its insistence that Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be abstracted from his biography. The opening chapters situate Nietzsche firmly within the Lutheran parsonage in which he was raised, noting the formative role of Scripture, hymns, and catechism in his early life. The death of his father when Nietzsche was still a child, followed shortly after by the death of his younger brother, marked a decisive rupture. The household became one of mourning, and Nietzsche's subsequent intellectual trajectory must be read in the shadow of this absence.[1]

The transition from the parsonage to Schulpforta and Bonn University is described as an eclipse of faith. Immersion in the Greek classics shifted Nietzsche's imagination from psalms and sermons to tragedy and myth, and his encounter with Schopenhauer at Leipzig provided a metaphysical vision of blind striving that resonated deeply with his own experience. By the time he moved toward his professorship in Basel, the framework of Christian belief had already been displaced by alternative philosophical sources.

This framing presents Nietzsche's thought not as the product of abstract speculation but as intimately bound to his life. His writings are interpreted as the transformation of wounds, experiences, and losses into aphorisms and doctrines. Such an approach positions Nietzsche's philosophy as a response to concrete biographical realities, rather than as a disembodied system.

II. The Method of Confrontation: Hammer Against Rock

One of the central interpretive decisions in *ÜBERMENSCH* is methodological. Sayles does not approach Nietzsche with the tools of conventional historical analysis alone, nor does he attempt to reconstruct Nietzsche's philosophy as a systematic whole. Instead, he adopts a mode of engagement that reflects Nietzsche's own rhetorical style.

Nietzsche described his task as "philosophizing with a hammer,"[2] a phrase that encapsulates both iconoclasm and diagnosis. The hammer smashes

idols, but it also tests them to hear which ring hollow. Sayles takes this metaphor seriously, positioning his own work as a counter-hammer: one that subjects Nietzsche's pronouncements to the test of coherence and durability. Rather than neutralize Nietzsche's rhetoric through detached commentary, *ÜBERMENSCH* preserves the intensity of confrontation, thereby underscoring the seriousness of Nietzsche's claims and their implications.

The counterpoint to this proclamation is drawn not from secular philosophy but from biblical and theological sources. Where Nietzsche sees in the death of God the collapse of all foundations, Sayles places this alongside the confession of Christ's resurrection. In doing so, the engagement is not a retreat into abstraction but a direct juxtaposition: Nietzsche's funeral oration is set against the proclamation of new life.[3]

III. The Logos-Centred Metaphysic

A further distinctive element of *ÜBERMENSCH* is the metaphysical framework within which Nietzsche's doctrines are assessed. Rather than limiting itself to exegetical analysis of Nietzsche's texts or to historical contextualisation, the book employs a comprehensive Logos-centred vision of reality. This framework has been developed across Sayles's wider body of work and provides the categories through which Nietzsche's claims are evaluated.

The framework rests on three interrelated concepts: the Information Field (IΔF), the Second Shamay, and the Hieroglyphic Stream of Conscious Perception (HSCP). Each plays a role in establishing a metaphysic that regards reality not as self-generated flux but as authored, ordered, and sustained. The contrast with Nietzsche's chaotic ontology is thereby made explicit.

IV. The Death of God and the Resurrection of Christ

Perhaps no phrase is more closely associated with Nietzsche than the declaration that "God is dead." First introduced in *The Gay Science* (§125), the proclamation is framed through the parable of the madman. The dramatic image has become a touchstone of modern thought, symbolising both the collapse of traditional metaphysics and the emergence of nihilism.

Sayles treats this passage not as rhetorical flourish but as a decisive moment in intellectual history. He reads the madman's cry as an articulation of the consequences of modern unbelief: if God is no longer

regarded as the ground of meaning, morality, and knowledge, then nothing remains but void. Nietzsche's own question, "Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?" is taken as an unflinching recognition that the death of God entails the erasure of orientation, foundation, and purpose.[4]

The interpretive strategy employed is to place this proclamation alongside the biblical confession of Christ's resurrection. The contrast is sharp: Nietzsche imagines God's grave, but the Christian tradition proclaims an empty tomb.[5]

V. The Will to Power and Divine Sovereignty

A second pillar of Nietzsche's philosophy is the concept of the *will to power*. Emerging initially from Schopenhauer's notion of blind striving, Nietzsche reinterprets existence itself as a dynamic field of force. For him, life is not grounded in reason, providence, or order, but in an irreducible drive toward expansion and domination.

ÜBERMENSCH treats this doctrine as central, presenting it as a vision of reality in which morality and truth become instruments of power. The book contrasts this with the theological category of sovereignty: power as purposeful governance rather than chaos. Sovereignty is articulated not as arbitrary domination but as a principle uniting strength, wisdom, and mercy. In this light, the will to power is exposed as a self-defeating vision of existence, while sovereignty offers coherence.[6]

VI. Slave and Master Morality in Contrast to the Cross

Nietzsche's analysis of morality, developed most clearly in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, frames Christianity as a slave revolt in values. What the strong once called "good," the weak redefined as "evil," elevating humility and pity as virtues.

Sayles acknowledges the force of Nietzsche's genealogy, but sets it against the paradox of the cross. Weakness, in this alternative framework, is not celebrated for its own sake but becomes the arena in which divine strength is revealed. The Christian proclamation that "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10) thus directly contradicts Nietzsche's dismissal of pity as poison.

VII. The Übermensch as False Christ

The figure of the Übermensch, central to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is presented as Nietzsche's alternative to transcendence. Sayles interprets this figure as a parody of Christ: a savior without redemption, a redeemer without grace. The similarities in form—the prophetic rhetoric, the descent, the promise of transformation—only accentuate the divergence in substance.

The analysis concludes that the Übermensch functions less as a possibility than as an unfulfilled ideal. As anthropology it denies givenness; as soteriology it offers no hope of overcoming death. By situating it within a Christological horizon, Sayles demonstrates its inadequacy as an alternative.[7]

VIII. Eternal Recurrence Versus Biblical Consummation

The doctrine of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche's "heaviest weight," proposes the affirmation of existence as endlessly repeating. Sayles interprets this as an attempt at radical affirmation, but one that collapses into futility.

Against this stands the biblical vision of consummation: not recurrence but renewal, not repetition but transformation—"Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). By contrasting cyclical futility with eschatological hope, the book highlights the inability of recurrence to redeem existence.[8]

IX. Nietzsche's Cultural and Philosophical Legacy

The legacy of Nietzsche's philosophy extends across existentialism, postmodernism, literature, and psychology. Sartre's radical freedom, Camus's absurd, Foucault's histories of power, and Derrida's deconstruction all bear Nietzsche's imprint. *ÜBERMENSCH* surveys these inheritances, concluding that while Nietzsche's insights remain profound, his successors inherit the same instability.

The appropriation of Nietzsche's ideas by political ideologies further demonstrates the risks of doctrines untethered from transcendence. Although Nietzsche himself rejected nationalism and anti-Semitism, elements of his philosophy were selectively adapted by totalitarian movements. This legacy underscores the dangers of philosophies of will severed from moral accountability.

X. *Ecce Homo* — Behold the Man

The conclusion turns to Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, in which he cast himself as a prophetic figure. Sayles juxtaposes this with the biblical *Ecce Homo* of John 19:5, reclaiming the phrase as a pointer not to Nietzsche but to Christ.

This rhetorical reversal encapsulates the method of the book: Nietzsche's categories are engaged at full force but ultimately redirected toward an alternative horizon. Against the figure of the philosopher stands the figure of the Logos incarnate. Against nihilism stands the proclamation of resurrection.

Conclusion and Final Assessment

ÜBERMENSCH: Contending Nietzsche offers a comprehensive confrontation with one of modernity's most radical thinkers. By combining biography, textual analysis, metaphysical framework, and theological reflection, the book presents Nietzsche's philosophy in its full force while exposing its inherent limitations.

The distinctive achievement of the work lies in its method: Nietzsche's hammer is met not by avoidance but by counter-proclamation. The categories of will, morality, overcoming, and recurrence are acknowledged in their depth, but ultimately revealed to be insufficient when measured against an alternative vision grounded in Logos.

As such, the book contributes not only to Nietzsche studies but also to broader discussions of nihilism, modernity, and the possibility of meaning. It demonstrates that Nietzsche's thought remains unavoidable, but also that it is not unanswerable. The final word belongs not to the cry of absence but to the proclamation: *Ecce Homo*—Behold the Man.

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